



# SHARP FACTS

## HIV Frequently Asked Questions



### **Can I get HIV from kissing?**

HIV is not casually transmitted, so kissing on the cheek is very safe. Even if the other person has the virus, your unbroken skin is a good barrier. No one has become infected from such ordinary social contact as dry kisses, hugs, and handshakes.

Open-mouth kissing is considered a very low-risk activity for the transmission of HIV. However, prolonged open-mouth kissing could damage the mouth or lips and allow HIV to pass from an infected person to a partner and then enter the body through cuts or sores in the mouth. Because of this possible risk, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends against open-mouth kissing with an infected partner. There is only one case that suggests a woman became infected with HIV from her sex partner through exposure to contaminated blood during open-mouth kissing.

### **Can I get HIV from oral sex?**

Yes, it is possible for you to become infected with HIV through performing oral sex. There have been a few cases of HIV transmission from performing oral sex on a person infected with HIV. Blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, and vaginal fluid all may contain the virus. Cells in the mucous lining of the mouth may carry HIV into the lymph nodes or the bloodstream. The risk increases if you have cuts or sores around or in your mouth or throat; if your partner ejaculates in your mouth; or if your partner has another STD.

It is even possible for you to become infected with HIV through receiving oral sex. If your partner has HIV, blood from their mouth may enter the urethra (the opening at the tip of the penis), the vagina, the anus, or directly into the body through small cuts or open sores. While no one knows exactly what the degree of risk is, evidence suggests that the risk is less than that of unprotected anal or vaginal sex.

### **Can I get HIV from getting a tattoo or through body piercing?**

A risk of HIV transmission does exist if instruments contaminated with blood are either not sterilized or disinfected or are used inappropriately between clients. CDC recommends that instruments that are intended to penetrate the skin be used once, then disposed of or thoroughly cleaned and sterilized.

Personal service workers who do tattooing or body piercing should be educated about how HIV is transmitted and take precautions to prevent transmission of HIV and other blood-borne infections in their settings. If you are considering getting a tattoo or having your body pierced, ask the staff at the establishment about procedures they use to prevent the spread of HIV and other blood-borne infections, such as hepatitis B virus. You also may call the local health department to find out what sterilization procedures are in place in the local area for these types of establishments.

### **Should I be concerned about getting infected with HIV while playing sports?**

There are no documented cases of HIV being transmitted during participation in sports. The very low risk of transmission during sports participation would involve sports with direct body contact in which bleeding might be expected to occur.

If someone is bleeding, their participation in the sport should be interrupted until the wound stops bleeding and is both antiseptically cleaned and securely bandaged. There is no risk of HIV transmission through sports activities where bleeding does not occur.

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### **Can I get infected with HIV from mosquitoes?**

No. Since the beginning of the HIV epidemic there has been concern about transmission of HIV by biting and bloodsucking insects, such as mosquitoes. However, studies conducted by the CDC and elsewhere have shown no evidence of HIV transmission through mosquitoes or any other insects -- even in areas where there are many cases of AIDS and large populations of mosquitoes. Lack of such outbreaks, despite intense efforts to detect them, supports the conclusion that HIV is not transmitted by insects.

When an insect bites a person, it does not inject its own or a previously bitten person's or animal's blood into the next person bitten. Rather, it injects saliva, which acts as a lubricant so the insect can feed efficiently. Diseases such as yellow fever and malaria are transmitted through the saliva of specific species of mosquitoes. However, HIV lives for only a short time inside an insect and, unlike organisms that are transmitted via insect bites, HIV does not reproduce (and does not survive) in insects. Thus, even if the virus enters a mosquito or another insect, the insect does not become infected and cannot transmit HIV to the next human it bites.

### **Can I get HIV from casual contact (shaking hands, hugging, using a toilet, drinking from the same glass, or the sneezing and coughing of an infected person)?**

No. HIV is not transmitted by day-to-day contact in the workplace, schools, or social settings. HIV is not transmitted through shaking hands, hugging, or a casual kiss. You cannot become infected from a toilet seat, a drinking fountain, a door knob, dishes, drinking glasses, food, or pets.

A small number of cases of transmission have been reported in which a person became infected with HIV as a result of contact with blood or other body secretions from an HIV-infected person in the household. Although contact with blood and other body substances can occur in households, transmission of HIV is rare in this setting. However, persons infected with HIV and persons providing home care for those who are HIV-infected should be fully educated and trained regarding appropriate infection-control techniques.

HIV is not an airborne or food-borne virus, and it does not live long outside the body. HIV can be found in the blood, semen, or vaginal fluid of an infected person. The three main ways HIV is transmitted are:

- through having sex (anal, vaginal, or oral) with someone infected with HIV.
- through sharing needles and syringes with someone who has HIV.
- through exposure (in the case of infants) to HIV before or during birth, or through breast feeding.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Your medical care provider should be consulted if you think you may have been exposed to any sexually transmitted disease. CDC provides information through their National AIDS Hotline at (800) 342-AIDS (2437). For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP) Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

This information was adapted by the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), Directorate of Health Promotion and Population Health, Navy Environmental Health Center in Norfolk Virginia from material developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention.